

PERENNIALISM AND THE RELIGIOUS COMMON PLATFORM OF MYSTICAL TRADITION IN JAVA

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Abstract:

This article examines perennials' understanding through the Javanese mysticism tradition that has developed before and after the arrival of Islam. The focus on perennials in this article is based on recognizing and equality of noble values in every religion that has ever developed in Javanese society, such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. Previous studies have emphasized that Javanese mysticism is studied from the acculturation of culture with religion. Even this understanding of religion is considered the antithesis of religious exclusivism and conservatism that is currently developing. It is just that the study of Javanese mysticism in the approach of religious perennials is infrequent and limited. This study uses a library research method to reveal the values of mysticism that develop across the religious boundaries of Javanese society. The findings of this study are that there are several teachings of Javanese mysticism, including the conceptions of tantrism, tantularism, and manunggaling kawula gusti. These conceptions illustrate the openness of Javanese society to various religions. They believe that in religions, there is a commonality in ultimate truth or divinity and mystical unity.

Keywords: *Common Platform; Javanese Religion; Mystical Tradition; Perennialism; Pluralism*

A. Introduction

According to historical studies, mysticism has a critical role in the evolution of religion in Indonesia, particularly in Java. Since, before the advent of Islam, most people's Hindu-Buddhist cultural traditions were undoubtedly dominated by mystical components.¹ "Our people's existence, which was historically animistic and Hinduistic, has taken on a new hue since the advent of Islam. At its

¹ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa* (Jakarta: Gramedia, 1984), 53; Merle Calvin Rieckles, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2006); Maryse Kruithof, "The Acceptance of New Religions on Java in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Various Muslim and Christian Currents," *Kawalu: Journal of Local Culture* 5, no. 1 (2018): 83, <https://doi.org/10.32678/kawalu.v5i1.1877>.

inception, namely, during the age of *kewalian* (sainthood), Islam's nature was preoccupied with mystical teachings and practices," said Ki Hajar Dewantara, a pioneering figure in education for indigenous Indonesians from the Dutch colonial era.²

A Preliminary study by Sartini, Ahimsa-Putra, and Al Makin concludes that Javanese mysticism thrives in almost every aspect of life, within the palace family, *pesantren* (Indonesian Islamic boarding school), faith groups, and the general public. In particular, the Islam that was introduced to Indonesia and Java was Islam, which was formulated as mystical Islam. Therefore, Islamic mysticism is easier to develop and adapt to the public understanding of Javanese society.³ Rubaidi found that the concept of Islam in the archipelago shows the combined characteristics of Javanese culture (the original religion of Java, Hinduism, and Buddhism) with the intrinsic dimensions of Islam itself. This combination occurs because of the connection or affinity between two mysticisms, namely Javanese mysticism and Islamic mysticism, containing the teachings of the oneness of God (*tawhid*). It is what allows acculturation between Javanese and Islamic culture.⁴ Sahlan and Fatchan also stated that Islam was well accepted in Java because the mystical aspects of Islam (Sufism) brought by the Sufis have many similarities with the concept of Javanese esoteric philosophy.⁵

Previous studies described above have emphasized that Javanese mysticism is studied from the acculturation of culture with religion, including Islam. Even this understanding of religion is considered the antithesis of religious exclusivism and conservatism that grew after 1965⁶ and continues to strengthen after the reformation in Indonesia.⁷ It is just that the study of Javanese mysticism in the approach of religious perennials is infrequent and limited. One of the relevant studies is the study by Baharudin and Luthfan (2017) which found that the perennial perspective is very relevant to the context of Indonesia's diversity of religions and beliefs. Parallel to the ancestor's teachings of the noble values of unity and religious harmony as manifested in the motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, Tan Hana Dharma Mangrua*, which means

² Ki Hajar Dewantara, *Majelis Luhur Taman Siswa Bag II A* (Yogyakarta, 1967), 54–55.

³ Sartini, Heddy Shri Ahimsa-Putra, and Al Makin, "A Preliminary Survey on Islamic Mysticism in Java," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 15, no. 2 (2016): 1–40, <https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v16i2.1116>.

⁴ Rubaidi Rubaidi, "Javanese Islam: A Blend of Javanese Culture and Islamic Mysticism Viewed from Post-Colonial Perspective," *El Harakah: Jurnal Budaya Islam* 21, no. 1 (June 12, 2019): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.18860/el.v21i1.6066>.

⁵ Asmaun Sahlan and Ach Fatchan, "Collaboration Sufism Islamic Adherents Javanese in the Story Puppet of Dewaruci in Java Indonesia," *The Social Sciences* 11, no. 21 (2016): 5211–17. DOI: 10.36478/sscience.2016.5211.5217

⁶ Gutomo Bayu Aji, "Karakter Keberagaman Di Java Pasca Geertz," *Jurnal Masyarakat Dan Budaya*, April 30, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jmb.v22i1.942>.

⁷ Martin Van Bruinessen, *Contemporary Development in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the "Conservative Turn"* (Singapore: ISEAS, 2013); Kikue Hamayotsu, "Conservative Turn? Religion, State and Conflict in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2014): 815–25.

different but still one.⁸

By applying the perennial philosophy perspective and library research approach, this article aims to analyze critical concepts in the Javanese mysticism tradition that has developed before and after the arrival of Islam, to see the common platform of mystical traditions in them. The emphasis on the perennial approach in mysticism, which is based on its appreciation of the equality of noble values in each religion, is crucial to study in contemporary Indonesia, as this model is regarded to be a religious trend that will endure.

B. Religion in the Perennial Perspective

The term perennialism in this article refers to the perennial philosophy promoted by Rene Guenon (1886-1951), Anand K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998),⁹ and intellectual circles such as Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Aldous Huxley, Huston Smith, and others.¹⁰ Regarding the term perennial, we can understand it in two meanings: *first*, as a trait that refers to philosophy with eternal teachings—whatever its name; *secondly*, as the proper name of a particular philosophical tradition. The first view is represented by Karl Jaspers, while Charles B. Smith represents the second view.

Jasper does not accept perennial philosophy as a particular philosophical system in his book, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy*. Any philosophy of its form or type is perennial or eternal. Philosophy is a perennial process that is not subject to temporal changes and rules. Philosophy is the continuous and endless contemplation of the eternal mystery of being, the only object to which the thinkers of each age make equally valid contributions.¹¹ Jasper's view is reinforced by James Collins, who firmly rejects the use of the term perennial philosophy as the proper name of a particular philosophical system. According to him, perennial philosophy is an adjective, namely philosophy that is perennial or eternal philosophy. Technically, he concretizes the perennial understanding to synthesize two or more different philosophical thoughts into one integral and universal system of thought.¹²

⁸ M. Baharudin and Muhammad Aqil Luthfan, "The Transcendent Unity Behind the Diversity of Religions and Religiosity in the Perspective of Perennial Philosophy and Its Relevance to the Indonesian Context," *Walisongo: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 25, no. 2 (2017): 325–60, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.25.2.2025>.

⁹ Huston Smith, "Is There a Perennial Philosophy?," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55, no. 3 (May 27, 1987): 553–66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1464070>.

¹⁰ Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo, "The Traces of the Bhagavad Gita in the Perennial Philosophy—A Critical Study of the Gita's Reception among the Perennialists," *Religions* 11, no. 5 (2020): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11050229>.

¹¹ Karl Jaspers, *The Perennial Scope of Philosophy* (New York: Philosophical Library Inc., 1949), 173.

¹² Zulfan Taufik, "Sufisme Perennial Pada Masyarakat Perkotaan: Kasus Padepokan Thaha Jakarta," *Jurnal Penelitian Keislaman* 11, no. 1 (2015): 1–16, <http://ejurnal.iainmataram.ac.id/index.php/lemlit/article/view/535>

In contrast to the first interpretation by Jasper and Collins, Charles B. Schmitt considers the term perennial philosophy as a proper name, namely as a name for a specific philosophical system. Schmitt mentions that since the emergence of perennial philosophical thought patterns in ancient times (the time of the early thinkers), it was only in the 16th century that the term perennial philosophy was used as the name of this philosophical system. The term perennial of this type of philosophy, according to Schmitt, means that this philosophy persists throughout the ages, and its authenticity can be passed down from generation to generation and can transcend the tendency of alternating styles of philosophy. He explored Schmitt's view from the concepts of perennial philosophy from several figures who directly or indirectly indicated a specific type of philosophy called perennial philosophy. These figures include Marcilio Ficino, Giovanni Pico, Agostino Steuco, Leibniz, and many other thinkers.¹³

Aldous Huxley added that perennial philosophy has three main branches, namely: *First*, metaphysics recognizes the existence of Reality which is the substance of this world, whether material, biological, or intellectual. *Secondly*, psychology finds in human beings' essences similar, or even identical, to the Divine Reality. *Thirdly*, the ethic that makes man's ultimate goal is recognizing the immanent and transcendent base of all things.¹⁴ These three fields are then labeled primordial and perennial because traces of their existence have been seen since time immemorial (the time of the early thinkers) and are universal and applied throughout time. Huxley then mentions that the fundamental character of the perennial philosophy is the primordial doctrines/teachings/wisdom in traditional tales of primitive societies and their mature form in every high-level religion. This primordial tradition, according to Nasr, in Hinduism is known as *sanatha dharma*, while in Islam, it is known as *al-ḥikmah al-khāḍirah*.¹⁵

Thus, perennial philosophy is a view that has traditionally been the handle and view of life and is maintained by those who call themselves "wisdom followers"—the gnostics in Christian terms and the Sufis in Islamic terms.¹⁶ The similarity of religious messages is what Frithjof Schuon calls the transcendent unity of religions. Schuon draws a dividing line between the esoteric and the exoteric to clarify the concept.

¹³ Charles B. Smith, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966): 505–32; Jonathan Shear, "On Mystical Experiences as Support for the Perennial Philosophy," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (June 27, 1994): 319–42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1465269>.

¹⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (London: Fontana Books, 1959), 9.

¹⁵ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and and The Sacred* (Edinburgh: Edinburg University Press, 1981), 67–68; Mohamad M Davar and Fatemeh Mohamadi Salamian, "Perennial Philosophy in the Intellectual Foundations of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Titus Burekhardt," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 8, no. 2 (2021): 241–50, <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v8i2.2295>.

¹⁶ Axel Randrup, "The Perennial Philosophy," *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 22 (2003): 120–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100023330>.

According to him, the primary difference is not between religion and another. The dividing line does not divide the significant historical manifestations of beliefs vertically; Islam from Hinduism, Buddhism, and Christianity. On the other hand, the dividing line is horizontal and is only drawn once to divide the various religions throughout history. Above that line lies the inner nature (esoteric), while below it lies the outer essence (exoteric). Furthermore, Schuon likens the esoteric to the "heart" of religion, while the exoteric is the "body" of faith. Exoteric religious life exists in world forms, but it originates from the formless essence of the esoteric one. Therefore, the mystical dimension is above or beyond the exoteric dimension, and the unity of religions will only occur at this formless, inner, or esoteric level. Meanwhile, at the exoteric level of beliefs, what can be done is dialogue based on respect for each other in harmony, not unity.¹⁷

C. Pre-Islamic Mystical Tradition in Java

Java is frequently referred to as a religious melting pot. Merle Calvin Ricklefs' seminal book *Mystic Synthesis in Java* details how the Javanese integrated Islam into their pre-existing religious heritage, including parts of animism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.¹⁸ The majority of literature highlights the syncretistic nature of Javanese faiths, which reinforces the notion that the Javanese readily incorporate components from new religions into their belief system.¹⁹

In the 8th to 15th centuries, the history of religion in Java was marked by the emergence of two major religions outside Java, Hinduism and Buddhism. Both religions grew up in an environment that had also developed its belief system—worship of ancestral spirits. In its development, the three belief systems influence each other. It is reflected in ideas ritual activities, and material forms used as supporting means.²⁰ Politically, the influence of Indian culture (Hindu-Buddha) and the royal system placed religion as a supporter of power. So that the diversity of the palace looks pretty dynamic, from Hinduism to Buddhism and back to Hinduism or later converting to Islam, is not a problem. Javanese culture produced during the Hindu-Buddhist period was very open to accepting any religion, with the understanding that all religions were good and faithful, as long as the practice of each religion must be

¹⁷ Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religion* (Illinois: Theosophical Publishing House, 1984), 6–30.

¹⁸ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries*.

¹⁹ Kruithof, "The Acceptance of New Religions on Java in the Nineteenth Century and the Emergence of Various Muslim and Christian Currents"; Agus Salim, "Javanese Religion, Islam or Syncretism: Comparing Woodward's Islam in Java and Beatty's Varieties of Javanese Religion," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 3, no. 2 (2013): 223–66, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v3i2.223-266>.

²⁰ Supratikno Rahardjo, *Peradaban Jawa: Dari Mataram Kuno Sampai Majapahit Akhir* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2011), 157.

aimed at the interests and greatness of the community. So, it is very natural that Javanese culture, by Simuh, is very syncretic, in which every religion is accepted with an open attitude and does not care about the right or wrong of the faith. So, for example, Hinduism and Buddhism in their home countries are hostile, while in Java, they can be united into the concept of Shiva-Buddhist Religion.²¹

Hadiwijono said that the conception of Hinduism that came to Indonesia was a form of Shiva worship. At that time, the Shiva religion that existed in Indonesia was Shiva religion which had been influenced by the Tantrism school, which taught the incarnation and embodiment of Brahman (the first substance, on behalf of everything) on several levels from the subtle to the gross.²² Rahardjo also said that one of the trends in the development of Hinduism in Java is that this religion is increasingly showing the nature of Tantrism, where yoga occupies a special place.²³

Tantrism tendencies are also seen in Buddhism. In Java, Buddhism, which began its development in the 8th century, was Mahayana, then developed towards Tantrism. This last school teaches the existence of the highest god incarnation in stages or ranks. The influence of Tantrism gave rise to Mahayana teachings about the highest Buddha figure, called Adibuddha, namely the first Buddha figure, who is seen as existing in the first beginning, without origin, exists because of himself.²⁴ Because of this Tantra, the teaching arose that Buddhahood can be attained in the present life by practicing yoga, worshipping the Buddha, and obeying the guidance of a teacher. As also said by Rahardjo, the main characteristic of Tantrism is the effort to unite the individual soul with the universal soul. This union is achieved through the path of *yoga*.²⁵

The term Tantrism itself refers to religious teachings and philosophy in Ancient India. They were associated with the cult of the gods and magical rites of the fertility of the land. From a historical perspective, Tantrism has undergone several changes in the influence of religions that developed later, such as Buddhism, Shivaism, Shaktism, and Vishnuism. Around the Middle Ages, Tantrism recognized that the reality of the world and the evolution of the world stemmed from spiritual first principles. The Tantrists maintain that the structure of the microcosm and macrocosm is identical. Therefore, they seek to find the key to knowledge about nature in human knowledge.

Through this tendency of Tantrism, we can more deeply see the meeting point of teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism (and later with Sufism embodiment) in Java. The

²¹ Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam Ke Mistik Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1995), 114–17.

²² Hadiwijono, *Konsepsi tentang Manusia dalam Kebatinan Jawa*, 25.

²³ Supratikno Rahardjo, *Peradaban Jawa: Dari Mataram Kuno sampai Majapahit Akhir* (Depok: Komunitas Bambu, 2011), 161.

²⁴ Harun Hadiwijono, *Konsepsi Tentang Manusia Dalam Kebatinan Jawa* (Jakarta: Penerbit Sinar Harapan, 1983), 29–30.

²⁵ The term “yoga” here refers to a spiritual effort to unite the individual soul with the soul of the universe or the supreme truth. Rahardjo, *Peradaban Jawa: Dari Mataram Kuno Sampai Majapahit Akhir*, 161–64.

meeting point lies in the parallel conception of the "Divine/Highest God", as well as about the human image and its liberation (perfection). Hadiwijono has summarized the similarities of these conceptions, based on Hindu and Buddhist literature found in Java, as follows:

1. Both kinds of literature (Hinduism and Buddhism) view the supreme deity as a silent void, motionless, unconnected, indivisible, and unspeakable.
2. The supreme god is transcendent, meaning that he is above all things not to be reached by human reason. However, this supreme deity eventually also comes into being within all beings because of incarnation or embodiment. This body occurs in several stages or levels. For example, Shiva religion mentions the body of *Niskala*, *Sakala-Niskala*, and *Sakala*.²⁶ At the same time, Buddhism calls it the Divarupa/Adibuddha, eight Buddhist figures (Sakyamuni, Lokeswara, Bajrapani, Vairocana, Aksobhya, Ratnasambhawa, Amitabha, and Amoghasidhi), and the Trimurti God (Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu). Parallel to the three ranks of the incarnation of gods in Buddhism that developed in Java, in the general teachings of Mahayana Buddhism, Buddha manifests himself in three different bodies, namely: Dharmakaya (dharma body/celestial body), Sambhogakaya (body of happiness), and Nirmanakaya (transformed body, the body of the Buddha Gautama).
3. Humans, like a miniature universe, embody the perfect divine body. The human soul is essentially the Divine itself, limited by its union with the body, both with the gross body and the subtle body.
4. Man's condition in life is sad because of misery. Humans are trapped in the cycle of life. So, it is because the soul is dazzled by the mortal world.
5. Release or perfection consists of returning to one's original nature, i.e. in the Shiva realm (Siywapada) or the Buddha realm (Buddhahood), by doing meditation or yoga.
6. One who has attained deliverance or consummation is one with the Divine, in such a way that he acquires all the Divine attributes.²⁷

Hadiwijono also said that there are differences caused by the character of the two religions in explaining the concepts above. For example, sometimes, one is more apparent than the other. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the systems of the two religions are the same.

D. Islamic Mystical Tradition in Java

Islam's development in Indonesia has always been inextricably linked to Sufism. Sufism has played a critical role in the growth of Islam in Indonesia, notably in Java.²⁸

²⁶ Niskala means the highest divine realm, an invisible because it has no material nature (immaterial), the origin of everything and the place where everything dissolves. Sakala-Niskala is a transitional realm that lies between niskala and sakala, has two properties at once, namely material and immaterial. Meanwhile, Sakala is a visible (material) divine realm. Rahardjo, *Peradaban Jawa: Dari Mataram Kuno Sampai Majapahit Akhir*, 163–64.

²⁷ Hadiwijono, *Konsepsi Tentang Manusia Dalam Kebatinan Jawa*, 49–50; Rahardjo, *Peradaban Jawa: Dari Mataram Kuno Sampai Majapahit Akhir*, 157–68.

²⁸ Oman Fathurrahman, "Sejarah Pengkafiran Dan Marginalisasi Paham Keagamaan Di Melayu Dan Jawa: Sebuah Telaah Sumber," *Analisis: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 9, no. 2 (2011): 447–74, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24042/ajsk.v11i2.624>.

According to A.H. Johns, the Sufis have been influential in spreading Islam on a large scale since the 13th century. They joined the tariqa (Sufi order), which escaped Baghdad after the Mongols attacked it in 1258 AD.²⁹ The spread of Islam was well-received by the Javanese. Islamic Sufism, as created by Sufis, shares a conceptual framework with Javanese mystical tradition. Additionally, the Sufis can appealingly express Islam, particularly by highlighting Islam's adherence to indigenous beliefs and traditions rather than modifying them. This adjustment resulted in the emergence of transitional forms of syncretism between animism-dynamism, Hinduism, and components of Islam.³⁰

Unlike the general opinion, which has agreed that Sufism is a form of Islam that first entered Indonesia, debates occur when discussing what the teachings of Sufism or schools in spreading the early Islam. Based on the search of Shrike and Drewes, the oldest Sufism found in Java is a manuscript which Shrike gave the title *Het Boek van Bonang*, but by Drewes, it was republished under the title *The Admonition of Seh Bari*. According to Zoetmoelder, this text shows the influence of Imam al-Ghazālī, especially his works *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn and Mishkāṭ al-Anwār* regarding the relationship between God and His servant, which is almost always mystical.³¹ For example, painting the appreciation of *fana fī Allāh* and *ma'rifat* as follows:

According to Sunan Bonang, the perfection of a ma'rifat person, his sight is deserted, nothing can be seen anymore, his appreciation is immersed in the majesty of God. The devotee has merged with the worshipped... What I mean, the perfection of ma'rifat to Allah, sucked in God forever, has no more behavior, has no will, has become blind, written, mute and lost his feelings. Movement and behavior from God.³²

A similar view was also confirmed by Indonesian scholars who said that based on the workshops of the wali (nine Muslim saints that spread Islam in Java, also called as *sunan*), the source of learning about faith and ma'rifat was the book of *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-Dīn* by Imam al-Ghazālī. However, if it is traced from the various written songs or silk fibers, it is not easy to classify the sunans into a particular tariqa. According to Chodjim, it seems that the sunans mixed the teachings of the tariqa from outside with

²⁹ A. H. Johns, "Sufism as a Category in Indonesian Literature and History," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 1 (March 24, 1961): 10–23, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0217781100000260>; A. H. Johns, "The Role of Sufism in the Spread of Islam in the Malaya and Indonesia," *Journal of the Pakistan Historical Society* 9 (1961): 143–61.

³⁰ Sahlan and Fatchan, "Collaboration Sufism Islamic Adherents Javanese in the Story Puppet of Dewaruci in Java Indonesia"; Masdar Hilmy, "Towards a Religiously Hybrid Identity? The Changing Face of Javanese Islam," *Journal of Indonesian Islam* 12, no. 1 (2018): 45–68, <https://doi.org/10.15642/JIIS.2018.12.1.45-68>.

³¹ P.J. Zoetmulder, *Manunggaling Kawula Gusti: Pantheïsme Dan Monisme Dalam Sastra Suluk Jawa*, 2nd ed. (Jakarta: KITLV, LIPI, Gramedia, 1991), 98.

³² G.W.J. Drewes, *The Admonitions of Seh Bari* (Leiden: The Huque-Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 20; Simuh, *Mistik Islam Kejawan: Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita: Suatu Studi Terhadap Serat Wirid Hidayat Jati* (Jakarta: UI-Press, 1988), 282, 292.

Javanese mystical practices that emphasized the aspect of meditation (in Javanese, it is better known as *samadi* or *manekung*).³³

Javanese people today think that the saints who played an essential role in spreading Islam on the island of Java taught the science of *ma'rifat*, also known as *ngelmu kasampurnan*, which makes human life perfect. This gnosis teaches that humans come from God, therefore, must strive to be reunited with God. The reunion between man and God in the world can be achieved through mystical appreciation, as is common in every esoteric teaching. Humans who can accomplish the appreciation of oneness with God will become people who are *waskitha* (bright vision) and become perfect human beings in their lives. Namely, people whose behavior reflects the actions of God. Because God speaks, hears, sees, feels all tastes, and acts using the human body.³⁴

From the use of the term *ma'rifat*, at first glance, it appears that the mysticism embraced by the Javanese is moderate mysticism, such as the Sufism of al-Ghazālī, which only tolerates mystical experiences to the level of *ma'rifat*. However, Hamid Nasuhi said this could be misleading because using the same term does not mean that the intended meaning is the same. The use of specific words in Javanese literature can be quite arbitrary, at will the author. The term *ma'rifat* used in Javanese mysticism, according to some opinions, is closer to the understanding of *wahdat al-wujūd* and/or *insān kāmil* in philosophical Sufism. Meanwhile, according to several sources, al-Ghazali did not agree with these ideas because they were considered contrary to Islam.³⁵

According to Ricklefs, if during the reign of Pakubuwana II (1726-1749) the literature of the Mataram court was marked by the discourse of Islamic revival, then at the end of the 18th century or after the Giyanti Agreement (1755) was reached, the Islamic discourse syncretism seems to have been developed deliberately by the poets and scholars of the court.³⁶ Koentjaraningrat said that this development was carried out, on the one hand, to maintain good relations with the growing power of Islam, and on the other hand, so that the wealth of pre-Islamic thought that they had was not lost. It is the cultural strategy that they launched from the late 18th century to the early 19th century. And Yasadipura I is one of the scholars who is considered the founder of this strategy. In fact, for his work, he deserves to be regarded as one of the figures who

³³ Achmad Chodjim, *Sunan Kalijaga: Mistik Dan Makrifat*, 4th ed. (Jakarta: Serambi, 2014), 204–5.

³⁴ Simuh, *Mistik Islam Kejawen: Raden Ngabehi Rangawarsita: Suatu Studi Terhadap Serat Wirid Hidayat Jati*, 363.

³⁵ Hamid Nasuhi, *Serat Dewaruci: Tasawuf Jawa Yasadipura I* (Jakarta: Ushul Press, CeQDA, UIN Jakarta Press, 2009), 261; Rubaidi, "Javanese Islam: A Blend of Javanese Culture and Islamic Mysticism Viewed from Post-Colonial Perspective."

³⁶ Ricklefs, *Mystic Synthesis in Java: A History of Islamization from the Fourteenth to Early Nineteenth Centuries*.

laid the foundations for the concept of the *Agama Jawi*.³⁷

It is not surprising that since the time of Yasadipura I, many libraries have sprung up, which Simuh calls *kejawen* Islamic literature. In contrast to the Islamic *santri* literature developed in *pesantren* and *surau* based on and related to the Shari'ah, the *Kejawen* Islamic library is one of the Javanese libraries that contains a blend of Javanese tradition with elements of Islamic teachings, especially aspects of Sufism and Sufism teachings. Nobility was possessed in the treasury of the books of Sufism. The characteristic of *kejawen* Islamic literature is that it uses the Javanese language, and very few reveal aspects of shari'ah; some even have a lack of respect for shari'a.³⁸

Sufi ideas, especially the notion of the world as an emanation of God and the parallelism of the microcosm (human body) and macrocosm, are easily assimilated into pre-existing systems of classification and magical control over the world. Sufi practices (wired, breathing techniques, methods of meditation and contemplation) are added to the already abundant collection of designs for gaining spiritual strength, courage in war and invulnerability. We may see traces of Sufi ideas in later "*abangan*" *kebatinan* movements, including overtly anti-Muslim activities. In particular, the Tariqa Syattariyah, which has always been easy to adapt to local cultural traditions, influenced mystical and magical movements native to Indonesia. However, ideas and techniques taught by other tariqa have also been adopted into various syncretic formulations.

This tendency, Bruinessen says, is not typical of Java. Because in the last 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, there were teachers of doctrine and spiritual techniques throughout almost the entire archipelago to acquire supernatural powers and knowledge, surrounded by a group of disciples and followers. Only a small number of them (usually those who are relatively wealthy and able to meet the costs of performing the pilgrimage to Mecca) are affiliated with one major international tariqa. Most of them have compiled their eclectic mix of spiritual techniques and metaphysical speculations from various sources, including visions and inspirations obtained through fasting and forms of self-repentance, meditation, and wandering in spirit-inhabited forests or caves, mountaintops or sacred tombs. Some claim to be of royal or aristocratic descent or to have a formal Islamic education degree, qualities that underpin their charisma. Others have a farmer background and serve the needs of their followers primarily from among farmers as healers, shamans, and fortune-tellers. In the context of religious orientation, they cover the entire range from strict *santri* teachings to teachings that are not influenced by Islam at all. They all made selective use of the supply of mystical ideas and techniques that were further enriched by Sufi

³⁷ Koentjaraningrat, *Kebudayaan Jawa*, 317.

³⁸ Simuh, *Mistik Islam Kejawen: Raden Ngabehi Ranggawarsita: Suatu Studi Terhadap Serat Wirid Hidayat Jati*, 2–3.

influence, but Indian and native Indonesian elements persisted firmly.³⁹

E. Common Platform in Javanese Mystical Tradition

In the religion study context, the idea of the ultimate truth (the Divine) refers to the belief at the core and underlies every religious action. Therefore, this section usually emphasizes aspects of philosophy that question the nature of truth and the ultimate goal of human life. On the other hand, the idea of the highest truth or highest principle is always understood concerning the ultimate goal of human life and the forms of efforts made to achieve that goal. In this context, Javanese mysticism is no different from all union mystique in other religious teachings and traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam that developed in Java.

Mystical practice is a common thread in understanding the continuity of Islamic teachings with previously established religions and traditions in the archipelago, especially Java. However, observers and researchers have proven that the Javanese do have diverse and mixed beliefs. As concluded by Simuh, Javanese mysticism is an amalgamation of various elements of indigenous (native), Hindu-Buddhist, and Islamic cultures, with varying degrees. In other words, syncretism is a view that influences the character of Javanese culture and literature.⁴⁰

By some observers, the cultural leniency of the Javanese people in accepting other beliefs, being Javanese Hindu or Javanese Islam, can not only be interpreted as syncretism. For example, Rahardjo said that not all mixtures from two belief systems could be called "syncretic". Syncretism requires the existence of a variety that forms a new integration of a system, including the basic concept of "supreme truth", ways of performing rituals, visual symbols used, and all tools of religious practice. In true syncretism, the beliefs from which they are sourced become fused into a new unity. Not so with the meeting of Hindus and Buddhists in Indonesia. In that case, what is identified is the *dharma* (supreme truth), while the separate ceremonies are still being carried out. By Rahardjo, the meeting of Hindus and Buddhists is called "coalition", not syncretism.⁴¹

In Javanese culture, religious tolerance, as described above, is also known as "*tantularism*". *Tantularism* is a culture that comes from the concept of Mpu Tantular in the Majapahit era. This concept is known as unification or harmony. In total, the concept reads: "*Sarva literary prayojanam atma darsanam*" or "*sarva literature prayojanam tatwa darsanam*". This sentence is another term for *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*

³⁹ Martin van Bruinessen, "Saints, Politician and Sufi Bureocrats: Mysticism and Politics in Indonesia's New Order," in *Sufism and the "Modern" in Islam*, ed. Martin van Bruinessen (London: IB Tauris, 2006), 94.

⁴⁰ Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Tasawuf Islam Ke Mistik Jawa*, 1–2, 65.

⁴¹ Supratikno Rahardjo, "Tinjauan Umum Atas Perangkat Penafsiran Sejarah Kuno," in *Indonesia Dalam Arus Sejarah Kerajaan Hindu-Buddha* (Jakarta: PT Ichtiar Baru van Hoeve dan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2009), 8.

tan hana dharma magrwa, which means different cultures but still one; there is no difference from one another. Furthermore, this expression means that the truth according to religion should be the same and not separate from the fact according to philosophy, science, art, and other disciplines, including paranormal, *kebatinan*, mystical, etc. It is the essence of the teaching of tantularism, which requires mutual understanding, respect, and respect between religions. This attitude to life is reflected in the mystical *kejawen* ritual which assumes that all differences can be reconciled.⁴²

From tantularism, we know that the Javanese people's openness is due to the belief that in these religions, there is a truth that lies at the mystical center, which is at the same time the meeting point of various faiths that appear different from the outside. In general, such a meeting point in the Javanese mystical tradition lies in two crucial teachings: *manunggaling kawula gusti* (oneness of the servant with God) and *sangkan paraning dumadi* (knowledge of the origin and purpose of all created things).⁴³ *Manunggaling kawula gusti*⁴⁴ in Javanese mysticism is the pinnacle of spiritual progress, while *sangkan paraning dumadi*⁴⁵ is the core of his mystical speculation.⁴⁶

Through the core of this mystical tradition, it can be seen that there is a common ground in esoteric teachings and practices in the religions and traditions that developed in Java. Hadiwijono has analyzed the meeting point by examining the core teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islamic Sufism that dominated Java in the early days of Islam. According to him, there are three core teachings which are the common

⁴² The boundaries between tantularism and syncretism are still blurred. This cannot be seen from the visible aspects alone, but must be understood in its entirety. Among the differences between tantularism and syncretism are: 1] syncretism combines, mixes, and harmonizes two or more beliefs. While tantularism believes that all religious differences actually lead to the same point, namely God. God is the source of everything; 2) the result of syncretism is the formation of new, thicker beliefs, while tantularism is more about respecting differences; 3] the view of tantularism is that the truth is substantial, not from a "container" or confinement, while syncretism in amalgamation may prioritize the most correct belief; 4) syncretism cannot be separated from relativity, while tantularism is relative. Suwardi Endraswara, *Mistik Kejawen: Sinkretisme, Simbolisme Dan Sufisme Dalam Budaya Spiritual Jawa*, 3rd ed. (Yogyakarta: Narasi, 2004), 59–61.

⁴³ Warsito, H.M. Rasjidi, and Bakry Hasbullah, *Disekitar Kebatnan* (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 1973), 18.

⁴⁴ Other expressions in Javanese that have similar meanings are *jumbuhing kawula gusti* (*jumbuh* = same-looking, appropriate), *pamoring kawula gusti* (*pamor* = mixed), and *roroning (loroning) atunggal* (two in one). The terms *manunggal*, *jumbuh*, *pamor*, and *roroning atunggal* indicate the existence of two (servants and God) who gather, unite, coincide in appearance, coincide, mix or blend into one. Ardani said that this understanding in Java is more of a syncretism between the heterodox Islamic mystical understanding and the Hindu *Kejawen* tradition and culture. Such syncretism then gave birth to the notions of *sangkan paraning dumadi* and *manunggaling kawula gusti*. Moh. Ardani, "Manunggaling Kawula Gusti," in *Ensiklopedi Tasawuf*, Vol. 2 (Bandung: Penerbit Angkasa, 2008), 779–80.

⁴⁵ More specifically, *sangkan paraning dumadi* explained issues related to God's teachings, the origin of the universe and humans as a small universe, deliverance and perfection, and so on. Endraswara, *Mistik Kejawen: Sinkretisme, Simbolisme Dan Sufisme Dalam Budaya Spiritual Jawa*, 17–18.

⁴⁶ Franz Magnis-Suseno, *Etika Jawa: Sebuah Analisa Falsafi Tentang Kebijaksanaan Hidup Jawa* (Jakarta: PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1991), 117–21.

ground in the religions that developed in Java: *First*, viewing the "Divine" as the Absolute Substance, meaning as the One Substance, which is without distinction (not ambiguous), which is free from all attributes and relationships. This similarity concerns the general idea and the detailed elaboration of the Absolute Substance. *Secondly*, view "the Divine" as transcendent and immanent. Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam teach that the immanence of the "Divine" occurs through incarnation or outflow (emanation). *Thirdly*, in the three religious systems, humans are seen as the perfect incarnation of the Divine. Therefore, man is the sum or summary of the entire universe. Humans who have received deliverance or perfection are seen as people who have united all powers in the visible and invisible worlds (*manunggaling kawula gusti*).

Based on this meeting point, Hadiwijono concluded the easy acceptance of Islamic teachings in Java. The reason is that Islam that entered Java could adapt to the Javanese mindset. Thus, in this *kebatinan* system, Shiva, Mahayana Buddhism, and Islam can meet like cousins.⁴⁷ Only through understanding Ultimate Reality and oneness with Him (*manunggaling kawula gusti*) can one be quenched for spiritual thirst because indeed, that is *the raison d'etre* of human creation and the purpose of life (*sangkan paraning dumadi*). Thus, a religion that fits in this context is a religion that serves as a forum, expression, and manifestation of the search for the meaning of human life through the actualization of humanity.

The emphasis on perennialism based on its appreciation of the equality of noble values in each religion is what some experts will become a religious trend that will survive in the future. Epistemologically, the future religion rejects absolutism and chooses what Swidler calls deabsolutizing truth or what Seyyed Hossein Nasr termed as relatively absolute. It is said to be whole because every religion has a claim and orientation to divinity. Still, all of them are relative because religious claims and beliefs have grown and formed in history.

F. Conclusion

Among the values of Javanese mysticism relevant to the value of religious perennialism are the conceptions of *tantrism*, *tantularism* and *manunggaling kawula gusti*. *Tantrism* is the meeting point of teachings in Hinduism and Buddhism in ancient Javanese beliefs. The meeting point lies in the parallel conception of the "Divine" or "Highest God" and the human conception and perfection. Meanwhile, *tantularism* is a cultural value that comes from the concept of Mpu Tantular in the Majapahit era. This concept is known as unification or harmony, which requires mutual understanding, respect, and respect between religions. Finally, the meeting point in this Javanese mystical tradition lies in two significant and widespread teachings: *manunggaling kawula gusti* (oneness of the servant with God) and *sangkan paraning dumadi* (knowledge of the origin and purpose of all creation). *Manunggaling kawula gusti* in

⁴⁷ Hadiwijono, *Konsepsi Tentang Manusia Dalam Kebatinan Jawa*, 72–74.

Javanese mysticism is the pinnacle of spiritual progress, while *sangkan paraning dumadi* is at the heart of its mystical speculation.

This study of perennials in Javanese mysticism emphasizes the similarity of the highest religious values and spiritual unity (union mystique) in the teachings of other religions and traditions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam that developed in Java. The diversity of beliefs that can be accepted and grow in this society is because the present religions prioritized the mystical aspect (eros oriented), which was perennial, compared to the legal element (nomos oriented).

This attitude of respecting differences and emphasis on spiritual values will become a religious trend that will survive in the future. The significant issues and challenges in contemporary religious life that perennials try to answer, manifested in the mysticism that develops in the Javanese tradition, is how a religious person can define himself in other religions that have validity and legitimacy.

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